

Sunday, August 11, 2024 pm

## **JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE (30)**

### **Wilderness Wanderings – 2**

### **Numbers 16 –21**

In our last lesson of this study, we noted Israel leaves Mt. Sinai, after almost 1 year there. They have their law intact and proceeded toward the promised land. But they refused to enter when 10 of the 12 spies gave a bad report. As a result, Israel was told that they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years (total) and all who were over 20 would die in the wilderness. Furthermore, the 10 spies died of a plague. Today, we continue with their wilderness wanderings.

NOTE: We have very little recorded concerning the time they were wandering in the wilderness. Most of the events that occurred shortly after being sentenced to their wanderings or toward the end of that period of time. It was a time of silence, because God was not with them as before (though He still did protect and sustain them).

#### **I. Wandering in the Wilderness**

##### **a. *The rebellion of Korah* – Num. 16-17**

- i. Note again: The timing is uncertain. A case could be made for this being shortly after rejection (still angry at God's sentence and dissatisfied with Moses & Aaron as their leaders, the fact that they are still alive, God AGAIN shows His power to the people, etc.) OR as they neared the end of their wanderings – within 2-3 years of that ending (time passed and they AGAIN want new leadership, they had forgotten how God dealt with the spies and others at that time, Moses had led them for so long, etc.)
- ii. Korah, a Levite, along with 250 leaders (likely Levites) rose up and challenged Moses. They are critical of Moses & Aaron taking too much authority for themselves. They noted that the entire congregation is holy (16:3). In essence they want their share of rule.
- iii. Moses fell on his face and challenged Korah and his company. He calls for Korah and the 250 with him to bring censers and incense and appear before the Lord the next day. They would let YHWH decide. We read of more rebellion and rejection of Moses. Moses is angry and asks YHWH to NOT respect their offering (16:15) noting he has been honorable in his service.
- iv. As the challenge is about to take place, YHWH again appears to Moses and tells him to separate himself from the people so that He Might consume them (vs. 21). Moses and Aaron again intercede – shall one sin, and You be angry with the whole congregation?
- v. He separates the people from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. And it is declared that if they die a natural death, God was not with Moses. The earth opens up and swallows Korah and their families. Israel fears and runs.
- vi. Fire comes out and consumes the 250 men offering incense. The censers are picked up and made into a covering for the altar – because they were holy (presented to the LORD).
- vii. **Aaron's rod** - 17:1- the LORD tells Moses to gather a rod from each of the 12 tribes and to write a name of each tribe on the rod. They were to be placed in the tabernacle "before the Testimony" (likely, the Ark of the Covenant). The next morning, Aaron's rod had sprouted buds, produced blossoms and ripe almonds (the others did not). Aaron's

rod was then to be placed before the Testimony as a sign to the people. Hebrews 9:4 tells us this was kept in the Ark of the Covenant. The people are fearful.

- b. *The people again complain against Moses and Aaron the next day (16:41-50).* Again the anger of the LORD appears and begins consuming the people. Aaron takes a censer with fire from the altar and makes atonement for the people. The plague stops, but 14,700 were killed (in addition to those in the Korah incident).
- c. *Moses' error at Kadesh – Num 20*
  - i. We now come to the latter years of wandering (~39-40<sup>th</sup>). In 20:1, we are told it is the 1<sup>st</sup> month (year not mentioned – but some believe it is the 40<sup>th</sup> year). But by noting various events that now unfold, this becomes clear (cf. Numbers 33:36-38- which describes Aaron dying the 40<sup>th</sup> year, 5<sup>th</sup> month).
  - ii. Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. (20:1)
  - iii. Because there is no water the people AGAIN complain against Moses and Aaron. Again they groan wishing they had died earlier and called the place evil and basically barren. Moses and Aaron again fell on their faces before the tabernacle of meeting. YHWH appears to them with glory. He tells Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock before them. Moses then struck the rod twice and said, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”. Water flowed abundantly and the congregation drank.
  - iv. BUT, YHWH spoke to Moses and Aaron noting the because they did not believe Him, to hallow Him before the people, that they would not bring the Israelites into the promised land.
  - v. The place was called, “the water or Meribah (contention).
  - vi. NOTE: Did Moses really deserve that punishment? Consider that he disobeyed God when he struck the rock, but MORE significant is what they said as they struck the rock. They did not give God the credit He deserved. As for Moses, there was clear & severe consequences to his actions. But we do know that he was saved when he died – Matthew 17:3-4 – he, along with Elijah, appear to Jesus to give him comfort. Also Jude 9 speaks of Michael contending with the devil concerning the body of Moses. This implies that God took Him and as Deuteronomy 34:6 says, none knew where he was buried.
- d. *More wanderings – Num. 20:14-21:35*
  - i. *Edom refuses to permit Israel to pass through – 20:14-21.* Edom was located just south of the Dead Sea. Israel requests to pass through their land promising to not take anything and they would stay on “the King’s highway”. Edom refuses, so they turn and go another way. NOTE: Why would they not engage in battle with Edom? Because Edom was the descendants of Esau. God had given them that territory (Cf. Deuteronomy 2:4-5).
  - ii. *Aaron dies – 20:22-29.* He is replaced by his son, Eleazer. The people mourn for 30 days. We are told in Numbers 33:38 that he was 123 years old (3 years older than Moses – cf. Exodus 7:7).
  - iii. *Battles at Hormah – 21:1-3.* The king of Arad (of Canaan) attacked Israel and took some prisoners. Israel made a vow to YHWH that if He delivered the people into their hands, they would utterly destroy the cities (as opposed to dwelling in them). YHWH listened. They called the place, “Hormah” which means utter destruction.
  - iv. *The Bronze serpent – 21:4-9.* As the people went around Edom, they again complained against God and Moses. No food or water and they “loathe this worthless bread.” (21:4).

YHWH sent fiery serpents through among the people and many died from their bites. The people again repent and come to Moses asking him to pray to YHWH to remove the serpents. YHWH told Moses to make a fiery serpent and erect in the midst of the camp on a pole. When one was bitten they were to look at the serpent and they would live. Moses complied and it worked (miraculously). More on this in our applications. NOTE: That this serpent was kept and would become a form of idolatry – 2 Kings 18:4, records Hezekiah, a righteous king of Judah destroying it along with other idols (this is around 800 years later).

- v. *Wanderings from place to place* – 21:10-20. We have described their wanderings after Edom refused passage. Some believe they went south of Edom and around, while others believe they went north (to the southern tip of the Dead Sea). There will be more lists of places they wandered in Numbers 33:1-49 & Deuteronomy 1 & 2.
- vi. *Sihon and Og defeated* – 21:21-35. These are nations northeast of the Dead Sea. These will be the lands that will begin to become the inheritance of the tribes east of the Jordan. We read that as with Edom, Israel requests to peacefully pass through the land of the Amorites (King Sihon). It too is refused and he brings an army against Israel. But Israel defeats them with the edge of the sword. They take their cities and began dwelling in them.
- vii. *Og defeated* – They then travel north (east of the Jordan) toward Bashan, where Og comes against them. Again the LORD is with Israel and they defeated them until there was no survivor left, and took possession of the land.
- viii. NOTE: The message that these victories would be sending to the land of Canaan where they were headed.

## II. Lessons to observe

- a. ***We need to be careful before we challenge God's leaders.*** It is one thing if one is teaching error and following his own agenda. It is also reasonable to question decisions while maintaining respect. BUT if men are standing true to God's word, they must be honored. Concerning elders we read - Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Timothy 5:19-20.
- b. ***Following God's instructions exactly is important*** – consider the consequence of Moses at Kadesh. It seems like a little thing to us, but the error was egregious. Where God sets boundaries, we need to respect them – 1 Corinthians 4:6, 2 John 9.
- c. Also understand that even though we can be forgiven of our sins, there may be physical consequences. We ALSO learn from this that simply saying, "I'm sorry" does not remove consequences. Moses did repent and pleaded with God, but He stood firm.
- d. ***We cannot let frustration lead us to sin.*** Moses error began with anger and rashness – Psalm 106:32-33 notes this. Ephesians 4:26 – be angry and do not sin. James 1:19-20. This is where self-control comes in. MOSES, after his sin (and repentance) kept serving God. We cannot give up.
- e. ***Lessons from the bronze serpent.*** There are some important lessons from this account.
  - i. It is a type of Christ dying for us – John 3:14-16.
  - ii. It demonstrates the need for faith (not faith only) to be forgiven. This is yet another example of how salvation involves: 1) God's grace; 2) Our faith (belief); & 3) Action – we act upon that faith doing what we are told.

- iii. Do not make idols out of icons! Whether a cross, crucifix or some other trinket (jewelry, paintings, statues, crosses in buildings, etc.), we need to be careful that we do not put special significance on those.

And thus, we see Israel as they are now preparing to enter their promised land. There are many lessons to learn and apply to our lives. We see the hand of God at work fulfilling His promises. We too can take comfort that He can fulfill the promises He has made to us. What about you? Will you stand on His promises?